

Readings for All Saints Sunday

30th October 2022

First Reading: Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.

As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: “As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever.”

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:11-23

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel: St Luke 6:20-31

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

A Reflection for All Saints Sunday

Following in the footsteps of the Saints

From its earliest days the church has recognised as its foundation stones those men and women, from every country and nation, who by their faith in Jesus Christ suffered persecution.

In Wales, we speak of the Age of the Saints that began with Dyfrig who kept Christianity alive in Wales after the Romans had left and when Christianity was waning in England and paganism was revived. These Welsh saints were often men or women who chose to renounce privilege and to live the monastic life; they appear as individuals of conscience in a violent and unpredictable age, and who also shared in an understanding that all of life is sacred and precious to God

Here in Wester Ross, we too have places associated with local saints who were individuals of conscience in a violent and unpredictable age. St Donnan met a violent death on Eigg; his name is preserved in Kildonan on Little Loch Broom and Clachan church was dedicated to him. The name, Loch Maree, is associated with St Maelrubha who established a sanctuary at Applecross.

The feast of All Saints has been celebrated in the Western Church from the 4th Century and was associated with martyrs: those who gave their lives as witnesses to faith. Importantly, it was to celebrate not just those who had been canonised by the church but also to celebrate to the unnamed myriads of men and women who over 2000 years have declared Jesus Christ as Lord.

So today we celebrate the unnamed saints, the multitude of very ordinary people who have followed Jesus in extraordinary ways and in who's steps we follow.

Our readings today, from Ephesians and Luke, are often understood as an ideal model on how we should live our lives. However, I believe these readings were originally intended as words of encouragement to the small communities of faith, who daily suffered persecution because they had committed their lives to following Jesus. For example, the Ephesus of our reading was a centre of pagan worship, famous for its temple of Artemis, where Paul himself had to be rescued from an angry mob who objected to his preaching. The words of these readings are therefore address to people who were poor and hungry and dispossessed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Hence Paul tells the community in Ephesus that they have now received a new inheritance from Jesus Christ.

The saints we celebrate today are the communities of followers of Jesus Christ, past present and future, whose names have disappeared in the mists of time, who may have suffered persecution and deprivation and other hardships because they remained faithful to Jesus in the face of powerful forces that opposed them. While their names may be forgotten, they are part of the same body of Christ that we belong to today.

When Jesus addressed his followers, he gave them practical guidance in how to cope with the realities of what they were experiencing because of their faith in him. They were the dispossessed, beleaguered and persecuted people of their times, and they have been followed by countless generations of Christians whose daily lives were also that of poverty and hunger and persecution.

Jesus was speaking to the powerless of how to respond to the powerful, who hated them, and who mistreated them, who were physically violent to them and confiscated their possessions. And Jesus's message is simple 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Jesus says to us it's down to you, my followers, to break this cycle of violence and hatred by adopting a radical model of behaviour. The foundation of this radical model of behaviour is love - just as it is that love underpins all that God is, and it is love that is manifest here today in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus reverses our expectations and challenges us to view our world differently. – to see the world through the eyes of communities that are poor, hungry and persecuted. Only through their eyes can we understand what the promise of the kingdom of God is all about.

Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep today for you will laugh.

We are part of a community of saints that stretches back through history to Jesus himself and that is continually unfolding before us, to generations yet to be born. The head of this community is Jesus himself and its foundation is love, a radical love that places others before our selves. In modern times much of Christian teaching has been to stress the need for personal salvation, that leads us to seeing ourselves only in terms of a personal relationship with God. But we are a community of Saints who have Jesus himself at the head of our community and love as its foundation.

Each generation of Saints are challenged to respond to the violence and hatred and injustice they encounter. For us today that involves facing up to the challenge of climate change and the abuse of God's creation. Jesus calls on us to love our enemies, to bless and to pray for those who destroy and squander the earth's resources for financial gain, with little concern for the damage they do to people and nature. We are also called to speak out for those whose lives have been impoverished and the species that are threatened, and to challenge those who perpetuate this abuse, and for whom we offer prayers and blessings, that they acknowledge the harm they do and change their ways. Only when this is done will there be a healing of creation.

Today we follow in the footsteps of the Saints and these saints are not far from us. We are united with them as we meet to break bread and to share wine in the name of Jesus Christ, as the body of Christ in this place today, united with saints living and departed.